

# VERITAS & VANITAS

A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE NONFICTION



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY MARION

## WINTER 2000



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WINTER 2000

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# Preface

The year 2000 has arrived and the new millennium is upon us. The editors of *Veritas and Vanitas* want to bring to the Ohio State University at Marion an issue that reflects the feelings surrounding the huge changes that this important year brings.

The emotions and experiences presented in this issue will hopefully allow you to reflect on personal feelings that you may have in the new millennium. The essays and artwork within these pages express the different views that our peers want to entertain us with.

Mostly, these pieces deal with memories of the past and lessons learned. Some, however, express wonderment and fears about the future.

The essays in this issue represent an attempt on the part of the editors to include work that reflects this campus community. As we compiled this issue, we worked by consensus, rather than by simple majority vote, and strove to compile a collection of essays that would reach the entire OSU Marion audience.

# Personal Essay



## The Ditch

*Jo Anne Fitzgerald*

I suppose he was an ugly child. His hair was dark brown, almost as dark as mine, and his bangs were cut severely across his forehead. His nose and his mouth and his hair all seemed to come to a point in the middle of his face and then again on the top of his head. His buck teeth and his patch of squirrel-tail hair at the top of his head, which frolicked somewhere over those bangs and a little toward the back of his head, were part of the reason that I picked on him.

His name was Arthur Iddings. He was in first grade with me but had none of my daring or any of my nastiness. He was a meek little boy, harassed by me during the day and by his mother the rest of the time. His sweaters always buttoned down the front and were an ugly brown. I seem to think that he wore knickers, corduroy knickers, but perhaps those belonged to another of my tormentees. His appearance is actually unimportant; it was his very existence that I objected to.

I objected and objected again. As often as I could catch him on the road near his house, I threw him into the ditch. It was a wonderful ditch, one from long ago which actually had some depth to it and weeds and stickers growing in it and a lot of water which became muddy—and even green slime atop the water at times from the never-drying air of the mountains. It was a marvelous ditch and positioned in just the right place, next to the road that went east and west and ended, actually ended, on a hillside next to the last house on the road. The part of the ditch that I patronized was placed midway on the two miles or so of the hollow road.

The terms of hollow and valley are confusing until you understand the geography. Roads that went east and west were called hollow roads, usually shortened to hollows. Hollows are dented-in areas, winding between mountains that have enough space available for squeezing in roads and houses. Valleys, on the other hand, are wider and longer, running lengthwise with the mountains and parallel to the winding little creek. The creek was full of brown trout and suckers and was called Potato Creek. The collection of houses, built on the road running east and west, made up the village of Betula. The road really didn't have a name; one either said they were going to Betula or up the hollow to the further end of the



road. I lived in the valley, just a couple of houses to the north of the other end of the hollow road, and only a small jaunt from the village.

Right beside that road, in the village, was my favorite ditch. It had always been there, made just for me I assumed. I could jump it I could spit in it if the occasion arose. I could sneak up on the frogs and snakes that had deserted it just for a minute and frighten them right back in it. I could toss pieces of gravel from the road into it and then greatly admire my ability to plop stones.

Life is very pleasing when there is a mighty ditch at your disposal. And I delighted in throwing Arthur Iddings into that ditch whenever the chance presented itself and whenever his mother stayed securely on her front porch, screeching away to the poor fellow to get on home.

"Arthur. Arthur," she would yell. "You get home here, Arthur. Arthur, you hear me? Get home."

And I would throw her son in the ditch and then stand in the middle of the road and mock her.

"Arthur. Arthur," I'd mimic as best as I could in my little girl six-year-old voice with nasty overtones. "Get home, Arthur. Arthur, your mother is hollering to you!"

He would crawl out on the other side of the ditch, the safer side, the side nearest his house that was set back from the road and run for it, his lunch bucket left floating in the muck and mumble of the ditch. He would sniffle with his crying, and he would bend his head down and hurry home like a good little boy.

There were times when his mother actually hollered at me, too.

"Annie. You go home. You leave Arthur alone. You hear me, Annie? You go home," she yelled to the terror of the valley.

I knew I was safe. She would never tell my mother. I certainly wouldn't tell my mother. And unless my bratty older sister saw me, no one would tell my mother. I was usually safe.

And so Arthur Iddings drank ditch water and wore the weeds from the ditch in his dark and messy hair.

I look back at the fun I had and cringe now with shame at my actions. No community should shun one of its families nor should it tolerate the town's brat tormenting another child. I can only say that I was a product of my time and a product of my family's and my community's excluding and bigoted attitude toward the Iddings family.

The bigotry can be explained by the date, 1946. Communists were no longer the glamorous figures of the 1930s. In fact, they had probably never been glamorous in that backward and isolated community. And the Iddings family, Communist card carriers and meeting attendees, was not welcome in a community that had sent a dozen sons to war and who mourned the lost of one of those on the beach of Normandy.

In 1946 I knew that I could torment that kid with impunity.

And so I did.

A few years later, just about the time the McCarthy hearings began, those hearings that now bring shame to our memories of that time, the Iddings family packed up and left town. What they were actually doing in Betula was never clear to me. And when they left, the village—made up of mostly descendants of the pioneers who settled the valley after the War of 1812—rejoiced. They gossiped about the Iddings, speculated about them, and now felt all the same again, no strangers mingling in their midst.

I suppose by that time I had found someone else to torment. I had left Arthur behind anyway after first grade when I jumped to third grade. He was less a temptation to me. I was a big kid, and he was now a year behind me, no longer a consideration for entertainment. I marched on listening to my own ditzzy drummer; Arthur's tune never again would stab its way onto my hearing.

The years have passed, and now I want to think that I sort of liked old Arthur Iddings. That is why I threw him down and mimicked his mother and laughed when his lunch bucket sank in the slime. The truth is that I was taught to dislike him, and the adults tolerated my actions.

It would be nice to think that Arthur Iddings tells his grandchildren about the little girl he knew in first grade, the one with the black hair and green eyes, who used to throw him in the ditch because she had a crush on him, even in first grade. I would also like to be able to apologize to Arthur Iddings and inquire about his mother. I would like to talk to him, adult to adult, and learn that he never really minded being thrown in the ditch. And I wonder if he is bald now and if he still wears cardigans.

Yet in a way I hope he has mis-remembered the past, rearranged it somehow—turned it around—and now tells his grandchildren about how he used to throw the menace of his first grade, the skinny girl kid with

the brown hightops and evil sparkling out of here green eyes, into the ditch.

And I hope he does justice in describing my ditch, my ditch that sometimes had frogs and snakes in it—my ditch that I would occasionally spit in, just because I could.



*Illustration by Stephanie Hughes*

## Hole in the Ground

*Didi Fahey*

Timothy's Crossing was the name of our ranch. Actually, it was more than just a house and a few out-buildings. It was an old whistle-stop town, lively enough when the Leadville strikes were rich, but now, nearly a hundred years later, it was mostly a ghost town. The old narrow-gauge track ran through the entire length of the valley beneath Mt. Silverheels and right through the center of our ranch, dead-ending on an old useless spur at Timothy's Crossing. At one time our house had belonged to the station master and saloon proprietor. Being the only building with a working fireplace, it served as a general gathering place for the thirty or so citizens. The balance of the population, some one hundred or more, were mostly miners and trappers stopping briefly for a drink and a hot meal on their way to and from the mines. The other structures—the saloon itself, a small postmaster's station, and a livery shop—were sorry looking buildings hurriedly constructed during the brief mountain summers and since converted into barns and feed sheds long before my mother and father arrived.

There were other buildings on the ranch as well, but most were located a good distance away from the center of Timothy's Crossing. The remnants of miners' shacks and old homestead foundations dotted our land with lost promises and hardened hopes. We also had a few gold mines on the property. Not many, but, on the upward slope of Red Hill Ridge, there existed clusters of abandoned shafts. The bit-houses to these mines had all but disappeared, so all that remained of those early prospectors were very dark holes, about two feet in diameter, sunk some several hundred feet into the face of Red Hill. As children, these dark holes were strictly off-limits. "The problem with these mines is the tailings that were dug up and discarded by the miners. Without anyone noticing what had happened, someone could slip on that gravel and slide right into one of those holes," my father would warn. "Anyone who goes near 'em is a damned fool and deserves what he gets." I took that to mean a stiff punishment, and so I stayed away from the mines because I was afraid of getting into trouble, NOT because of the threat to my immortality.

Things change slowly on a ranch. Like our predecessors, we would get a lot of wanderers up in the high country. We were told that most of the time they were just harmless transients, lost hunters, or the just-passing-through-don't-want-no-trouble types, romantically referred to in our household as vagabonds. Often, we would offer them a night of rancher's hospitality in one of the old miners' shacks. If they happened to be my father's age or if they were patient enough to listen to his old war stories, they would join us for supper and would regale the entire family with colorfully embellished exploits. But, if they were young teenagers or in their twenties, and had long hair and beards, my father and uncle would label them simply as *dodgers*, and, as if they carried diseases that would infect the herds, they were told to leave as quickly as possible, if not sooner. Often, the "if not sooner" part was accented by my father rubbing his hand across the butt of his rifle. Usually this approach worked its magic, and in a quarter of an hour or so, we would see these dodgers climbing up over the ridge, making their way into Fairplay.

Every now and then, when we drove into town, we would hear that yet another dodger was found hiding in someone's hunting cabin or ski lodge, and after being caught, they were sent down to Denver for official processing. "Nobody wants to go to war," my father would remind us whenever this would happen. "But if you're called then you're called, and you have to do your duty. There wasn't a one of us who wanted to go fight in the Pacific, but we all went just the same. These damned kids think that they can run up here and live off the land like some hermit." And then always, more thoughtfully, "Hell, these mountains'll swallow 'em whole. They'd probably live longer taking their chances in Vietnam, anyway." Rarely would we have any direct involvement with these cases. Most of them were handled by the U.S. Marshall's office in Denver, but sometimes our own local sheriff would be called into help, especially if someone was found on one of the local ranches.

I do remember the sheriff coming out to our place once. A house further up the valley had reported the theft of a horse and saddle, and the sheriff wanted to know if we had seen anyone riding Mr. Morris' old paint. My father and the sheriff shared a good laugh over the feebleness of that animal and each in turn questioned the mental



stability of the person who stole it. My father told us about it that evening and said, "Anyone stupid enough to steal *that* animal is bound to land in some trouble." He added that we were all to keep an eye out for the paint just in case it ran off, and old Mr. Morris just assumed it to be stolen like he did two summers ago.

My sister and I found the animal grazing high up on Red Hill just two or three days after the sheriff came by. He was easy to catch. We simply rode up to him and put a rope on him while he was grazing. At dinner time that evening, we told everyone that Mr. Morris and his horse had been reunited. I remember that he literally hugged that animal when we returned him. We had assumed that whoever had stolen the beast had given up trying to saddle it and had just left horse, saddle and all, somewhere up on the ridge. We rode back out to the ridge the next day to try to find the saddle. We did, but we also found a lot more. There was a small store of provisions stowed in one of the miner's shacks. There was a bunch of canned goods, probably from Denver because we had never seen the brand before, two blankets, and a canteen half full of water mixed with something else that had a sharp smell to it. There was also some evidence that someone had been cooking over a small campfire. Unfortunately, we couldn't find anyone to go with these belongings. Our father called the sheriff, and in a few hours an official man-hunt was formed. Just about every house in the valley had offered help, and soon there were about sixty people riding up and down the ridge looking for someone who didn't have the sense to steal a good horse.

For about four days we turned the valley inside out, putting off work and our lives to find a thief. The sheriff even patrolled the roads, picking up the hitch-hikers and giving them the "once-over" to see if they knew anything. Eventually though, we called off the search. No one was ever found. There wasn't a trace of anyone. No more fires, no more horse thefts, no one being bothered for any reason. Nothing. It was as if a ghost had been the culprit, and had vanished the moment we returned the horse. Fine thing to be a thief and come up missing yourself.

Between storms that next March, we were fortunate to have a Chinook wind come and visit us. These warm winds blow dry air from the Nevada deserts up and over the mountains, and overnight, melt as

much as two feet of snow off the high pastures. I always liked standing in a Chinook. They never stole your breath the way most winter winds did. Instead, they were soft, strong winds that wrapped around your body and held you in place. The day after the Chinook, we rode out to the ridge to see if any of our stock was stuck in the mud. The crowd that was grazing just below the ridge was, in fact, stuck four or five inches deep. After roping and pulling them out onto the dryer, rockier ground on the ridge, we tied our horses to some fallen bit-house timber. One of the hands noticed that the boards were all disarranged, as if someone had tried to chop some firewood and had slipped backwards into the shaft, still clutching at a bit of timber. Maybe he was looking down that hole while he had hold of some firewood. For some reason, people just like to look down a hole. I can't quite figure that out, but staring down into the darkness seems to be a fascination with some people.



*Illustration by Stephanie Hughes*

## Learning to Be a Lady

Marcia Dickson

In my grandmother's day, males were often educated in "the common schools of the day" and "the school of experience" rather than in public schools. Women from my grandmother's era and before could be said to learn from "the school of social expectations." Regardless of whether a woman went to high school or college—and by 1910, I'm proud to say, a third of the nation's college students were women—her hardest lessons came from learning to be a Lady in a world which held that accomplishment as the highest that a woman could claim, with the exception of motherhood, of course.

Lillian Grace Dickson was a Lady with all the nobility that the word once implied, not with the condescending "Little Lady" implications that make many a modern feminist (declared or undeclared) cringe. Being a lady in West Texas entailed far more than knowing which fork to use or how to address an invitation to a tea party. Being a lady meant managing to be strong, loving, kind, and smart in an era that at least *claimed* it wanted a woman who was docile and subservient.

Texas women have never been known for docility or for subservience. They often had to stop plowing fields in order to sew ruffles on their daughters' party dresses. But make no mistake, the party dresses held a social significance as important to a young girl's life as raising a good crop was to frontier economic existence. My Gran, who grew up on the cusp between pioneer and post-pioneer Texas, never plowed a field and, as far as I know, never sewed more than a few practical seams. She did live without in-door plumbing and the other amenities of modern life, washing clothes out in the back of the house with boiling water heated over an open fire so that she could be presentable when she stepped out for an evening or when she entertained, which was often. Part of being a lady was giving and going to parties.

Gran slipped occasionally from perfect ladyhood and when she did, whether by accident or design, the occasion was memorable. For instance, she'd never have entertained the idea of attending any formal occasion without her gloves and she never attended church without

wearing a hat. But her decorum could be easily shattered by her tendency to be absent-minded, her willingness to play the fool for charity, and her love of a good joke. She made all sorts of minor lady faux pas. According to Jessie Billberry, who was young and impressionable at the time, Gran occasionally didn't have a clue that things were amiss. Jessie was standing at the cash register of Gabriel's department store, sometime during the 1940s, when Gran realized something was wrong.

"Jessie," she whispered, "People are staring at me."

"Mrs. Dickson," Jessie replied carefully, "you're not wearing a skirt."

Sure enough, it was true. She'd been in a hurry to leave the house and "tore out" of the place wearing a carefully ironed blouse, a silk slip, and a tailored black coat—everything in perfect order except her skirt, which was still at home on the bed waiting to be donned. Jessie says that Gran laughed 'til tears ran down her cheeks and went home to pick up the missing item.

That affront to her lady-like dignity was accidental; other breaks with propriety were not.

It was most important to her to preserve dignity in those who needed it and pop the bubble of those who took themselves too seriously. While on a trip to Dallas in the early 1940s, her younger sister, Nina, took offense at what she considered to be her older sister's unlady-like behavior. Never being one to mince words, Aunt Nina haughtily requested that Gran consider the impression such uncivilized comportment made on the city-folk. Far from being abashed, Gran took off her shoes and trailed down the street dragging her purse on the ground, pointing at the sky scrapers, and generally faking the absolute awe of the legendary country hick in a resounding voice complete with an obnoxious accent. If they all hadn't been laughing so hard, Aunt Nina might never have forgiven her.

So much for refinement.

Ladies also bore the responsibility of dispensing comfort and charity to those who needed it. However, *real* ladies made sure that the recipients of their charity never had to beg or feel guilty about the fact that they couldn't provide for themselves or their own. This meant more than just working quietly from the church office or carrying food

baskets to orphans on cold winter day, like Jo and her sisters in *Little Women*. It meant having people to lunch and dinner, emphasizing the visit rather than the fact that the families were having a hard time putting food on the table. It meant sending visitors away with clothes that “suited” the beneficiary far better than the original owner. And at fund-raisers, it meant that women like my grandmother dressed up in silly costumes and generally made charming fools of themselves.

Being a Lady mattered very much in the first half of this century, much as class divisions and distinctions mattered. But deciding who was “country” and who was “cultured,” who was poor and who was rich, was relatively easy compared to deciding who was a Lady and who wasn’t. Being a Lady was as much a state of mind as it was a position on the socio-economic scale. A woman could be a Lady even if she didn’t have a penny, especially in the West where pennies were few. There were even distinctions between *lady* and *Real Lady* in that rougher society. A mere *lady* was a middle-class female from a good family who made it her business to maintain her family health and welfare. She avoided unpleasant tasks or experiences and only associated with those of her station in life. In public, she spoke in a modulated tone of voice, kept her skirts about her ankles and her mind above the gutter. Ladyhood could be a simple matter of appearances. A *Real Lady*, however, had a nobility of character that put others first and a simplicity of soul that saw behind surface appearances and valued individuals because it would be wrong to do otherwise. She was strong enough to support those in distress and, in times of adversity, conducted herself in ways that relieved the suffering of as many people as possible. She accorded farm hands the same consideration that she would governors and gave respect to those who earned it. A *Real Lady* was marked by her unquenchable vitality and the strong mettle of her personality and actions. *Real Ladies* might have to stand over the cauldron of boiling water to wash the clothes, but, if charity and necessity made it important, they never blinked at washing the neighbor’s or the hired help’s clothes along with her own.

According to all accounts, my Grandmother—practical jokes and all—was a *Real Lady*, born and bred. Her character grew, as any reader half educated in psychology or steeped in talk show wisdom might suspect, from her family’s influence. And a mixed bag that



influence was. Because of this she loved and depended upon relatives, friends, music, and a faith that Good was stronger than any manifestation of Evil.

Let me stop a moment and slightly digress.

My Grandmother, along with my Mother, was one of the two most important and influential people in my life. As I read these statements about being a *Lady*, I realize what a struggle it is to be objective about Gran after fifty years of unmitigated heroine worship. But to complicate matters, I must admit how difficult it has been for me all these years to force myself to emulate some of the examples she set for me. It's more than the struggle to be good and think charitably about those who I'd just as soon ignore or condemn to hell. It's that *Lady* thing. As much as I admired her as a woman, I can't imagine how she managed to be comfortable as the Lady she was expected to be.

Where she succeeded in meeting her society's demands, I failed, if not miserably, then at least consistently. Not because I didn't try. Under Gran and mother's tutelage, I accepted, rather reluctantly, the early seventies' values that dictated the outer trapping of ladyhood. I wore hats to church, dresses to school, and high heels and hose whenever I went out in public. Faithfully, I attended "Charm School" and learned how to serve tea at a reception as well as the perfect stance to take if I happened to find myself standing on a corner waiting for some inconsiderate beau. There was more, but you don't want to know. These actions were outward and visible signs of a deeper and troubling message about more substantial issues: a woman needed to be good, and good women naturally wanted to be *above all* helpful daughters, wives, and mothers. A lady's job was to make the world a comfortable place for others, particularly family members, even if it meant making the world less comfortable for herself. The hat, the dress, the hose and heels were indications that a girl was well-brought up—not that she was a lady. From cradle to grave, a woman needed not only to keep up appearances of being a lady but also to willingly sacrifice her own dreams so that those she loved could feel good about themselves.

After my introduction to the women's movement, I gladly forswore all pretenses of being a lady, and as a result made some rather

hellacious mistakes as a daughter, granddaughter, wife, and mother. As my mother once said, “Marcia needed to rebel a bit.” I did. Now I see, however, that in all that ranting against the constraints of being a lady, of being trapped in my mother’s and especially in my grandmother’s life, I missed an important point. The very *ability* to rebel was eased not only by my mother’s refusal to quit college when her parents needed her at home but also by the woman who mocked her sisters in the streets of Dallas. Furthermore, as I struggled to be recognized for my own talents rather than for those of my husband’s, I also forgot who it was that told me I could be anything I decided to be—who gave me *A Girl of the Limberlost*, a book about courage in the face of adversity, to read.

I was trying to remake what it was to be a woman, and for a time, I thought that meant rejecting the practice of being a Lady. Giving completely of myself seemed restrictive and self-defeating. I never appreciated the irony that self-sacrifice was the only characteristic of being a Lady that was as admirable as it was limiting. In a few short years, “being a woman” changed so radically for me and many other women of my generation, that our children (sons as well as daughters) couldn’t quite understand how being a Lady, or in the case of my sons, a gentleman, mattered. Such behavior was outside that of a self-actuated, fully functioning, successful person.

The quality of being a real lady drew people to my grandmother like a magnet: children, adults, elders. The secret, I think, was her willingness to put others at the center of attention without making it an artificial or self-serving act. She did not defer to others, nor did she expect them to defer to her. True to her name, she was gracious—and grace goes a long way toward making others feel important. You have to love someone who makes you feel that way.

Enough with the digression.

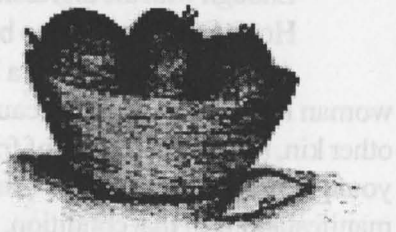
How did Gran learn to be the lady she was? Good question.

A woman learns to be a lady not from a book or a school. A woman learns to be a lady because other women teach her. Mothers, other kin, teachers, mothers of friends, and friends themselves lead a young woman to understand what it means to be female in all the manifestations of that condition. So just as my grandmother learned

about self-sacrifice and the importance of education from her mother and grandmother, she learned how to comport herself as a lady from the social activities that they encouraged and the behavior that they modeled.

In many ways, Gran's early life seemed carefree. She was the quintessential belle of the ball, the most popular girl in town, the darling of young and old. Yet, at the same time, she was also the oldest child of an alcoholic or possibly manic-depressive father and the chief support for her mother while the older woman—only sixteen years older than her daughter—held together family, hearth, and home. Her chances to go to college disappeared quickly, she only had one year at Texas Christian University before “something happened” and she had to come home. Educated as a lady but confined to a narrow life in a small town, I'm sure the years ahead loomed on a less than sunny horizon. Or am I transferring what I remember of my own late-adolescent fears upon what little I know of her past? There's no way of knowing now—nearly thirty years after her death. Even before the stroke that kept her bedridden for the two years, she wouldn't have told me. An original “Princess of Denial,” she actively sought to believe only the best of those she loved and to make the best of the circumstances she found herself in. She searched through the facts that formed unpleasant truths, looking for extenuating circumstances, lessons to be learned, positive elements in otherwise grim situations. Actions that could not be explained away or absolved were buried deep and never again brought to the light. Sound clichéd? Perhaps. But a *Real Lady* of her day did not remind others of their shortcomings nor did they point out flaws in characters. They did not bewail their manifold state or blame others for whatever misfortune appeared in the doorway. These qualities—whether triggered by mercy, optimism, or voluntary blindness—made my Grandmother a most pleasant and attractive woman. They made her a Real Lady of the first order.

*Illustration by  
Stephanie Hughes*



# Sibling Rivalry

*Diane Osborne*

Someone once told me that life is exactly what you make of it, and so it was on our farm.

We had neighbors, but there was at least a half mile between our house and that of the nearest neighbor. And forget having neighbor kids over to play—there weren't any. It was a special treat to have friends over, usually reserved for birthdays and other special occasions. For this reason, my sister, Cathy, and I became pros at creating our own fun, although at times it was costly.

Such was the time that I made our toy room into a makeshift beauty salon. I had always wanted to be a hairdresser. Using a bath towel as a cape, I draped Cathy and began to cut. The scissors I chose were those rather dull safety scissors with the rounded ends that kindergarteners use, but they shredded her hair just the same. She didn't have much hair to begin with, but by the time I was finished with her, she resembled a little brother more than a little sister. I was so proud of the job I had done that I eagerly called for my mother, hoping she would be as pleased as I was.

As mother entered the room, the smile she usually wore vanished and was immediately replaced with a look of gaping horror. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she glanced from the shredded locks of hair cluttering the floor to my sister's butchered hairdo. I realized then that I would not be receiving the approval I had sought. Instead, I spent about a half hour in isolation (although it seemed like forever), sitting on a couch while my mother frantically called my aunt, a licensed hairdresser, for advice.

Consequently, I was forced to give up hairdressing after that. I decided to take up teaching for a vocation. That profession was costly only when I taught Cathy something she wasn't supposed to know. I had a great deal of fun holding her over after class for detention and giving her a big, fat "F" on her papers and report card. Cathy soon refused to play, and I was once again forced into retirement. I moved on to other activities that interested the imagination of a six year old.

It was years later, when I reached fifth grade, that our relationship took an unexpected turn. Cathy developed a severe case of spinal

meningitis. Our family physician diagnosed her case within twenty-four hours of its onset, fortunately reducing the risk of brain and organ damage. Nevertheless, she was allergic to penicillin, a common treatment for meningitis and she struggled to hold on to life.

I learned everything I could about the disease, noting that it is often fatal. I remember being frozen with fear when faced with this possibility.

She remained in isolation in the hospital's ICU ward for several days while they determined whether or not her type of meningitis was contagious. When the doctor finally lifted the isolation order, I was allowed to see her.

I recall entering her room clad in sanitary greens, a mask covering my face. Had I not been wearing the costume, she still would not have recognized me due to the sedatives she had been given to reduce the pain caused by numerous spinal taps. Her body seemed so small, and it was as if her soul wasn't even there. I don't think I have ever felt more helpless than I did at that moment.

I prayed a lot. I begged God to spare the life of my sister. I probably even vowed to keep promises to Him that I made as a ten-year-old big sister, fearing the loss of her only sibling. My prayers were answered and I was more than happy to thank God for allowing Cathy to live.

I spent most of my teenage years submitting to her every wish, primarily due to the enormous guilt I felt because of her illness. It was also my way of protecting her. I'm not exactly sure what I was protecting her from, but I was definitely trying to be a good big sister. Somewhere along the way, though, our relationship became nauseatingly complicated. My pleasant compliance induced her into provoking me into an argument. Inevitably, we ended up arguing more and more.

On one occasion, she took great pleasure in pushing me down and shoving freshly mowed grass in my mouth until I puked. I could see the evil pleasure in her eyes and hear it in her laughter. I will never forget the rancid taste of the cut grass, causing bile to rise to my throat. I wretched for quite a while that day.

It seems strange, but the more I tried to placate her, the harder she tried to provoke me. Our arguments became more frequent and emotionally volatile. We usually began with a little bit of name calling. I



was usually “Ugly” and she was either “Fat” or “Stupid.” We used those names so much that we actually gave ourselves complexes, believing that there really was some truth to them.

As with most emotions, there is only so much provocation one person can take. One day, it came to a head, erupting like a volcano.

My dad had been out cutting firewood down the road. Mom had gone to town. Cathy and I fought all morning, and I was really tired of it. I never wanted to fight with anyone again. I climbed the stairs to my room and began to pack my bags. That was it! I was outta there! I had a car and a little money. I didn’t know where I was going to go but anyplace had to be better than living under the same roof with her.

I packed mostly sentimental items: pictures, letters from my boyfriend, a framed sketch that my grandmother had made of me as a baby, a family picture of the four of us together, and a few other breakable pieces that my grandmother had made. They were irreplaceable to me. Zipping the last bag, I carefully lugged the suitcase and bags down the stairs and gently put them on the dining room floor.

Cathy entered the room, curious as to what I was doing.

“I’m leaving. I can’t take this fighting anymore!” I said, defeat apparent in my voice.

“See ya!” she taunted coldly.

A tear came to the surface, but I refused to shed it in front of her. I bent over to retrieve one of the bags, hoping she wouldn’t see the tear. Out of sheer nastiness, Cathy kicked one of the bags. I could hear the jingling of some of the breakable objects I had stored inside. My rage quickly hit the boiling point. I pushed my sister. I heard her cry and was immediately ashamed that I had been so mean.

“I’m sorry,” I said honestly, trying to hug her. “I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

She looked me straight in the eye. “You ugly bitch,” she laughed.

Her words were more than I could take. I pushed her again. I pushed her hard—right through the glass in our front door. As she got to her feet, I saw the blood streaming from the slit in her leg.

Sure, I had meant to push her, but I had no intention of drawing blood. I was distraught and ashamed that I had once again lost control of the situation.

Evidently, Dad had come back from the woods. I heard the back door fly open and watched him stride forcefully into the house. My dad had never really been the disciplinarian in our family. Usually Mom took care of that. Nevertheless, we feared him more than we did her, maybe because of the authority he exuded over us, even though he rarely punished us. Or maybe it was because Mom had threatened us often with the "Wait until you father gets home" line. Either way, I was scared stiff when he faced me down.

"What the hell is going on in here?" he bellowed.

"She pushed me through the front door," Cathy cried.

Dad looked at me. His fierce gaze was trying to size up the situation. His eyes bored into me, daring me to lie to him, but I knew better. It was always better to come clean with him, than to get caught up in a lie.

"Did you do this?" he asked.

"Yes," I managed to choke out.

Dad shook his head in disbelief. "I knew sooner or later this was going to happen."

Dad saw the stream of blood and asked Cathy, "Are you O.K.?"

"No!" she cried. "Aren't you going to punish her?"

"You seem more concerned with your sister's punishment than the pain, so I'm guessing that you'll be fine."

"But Dad, don't you think she should be punished for this?" she repeated, gesturing to the broken glass and the cut on her leg.

Dad stopped cold and turned to her. "I'm not exactly sure how this argument got started, but I know that it stems from years and years of competition and rivalry between the two of you. I won't condone violence, but the two of you are going to have to settle this yourselves here and now, unless you think I need to get you a babysitter."

I believe my dad had directed the last part mostly to Cathy, since his gaze never strayed from her face as he said it.

He was right, though. We would have to settle it between ourselves. No punishment could mend the fences we had broken between us those years. The day had come when I was no longer a prisoner to the fear and guilt I felt over almost losing my sister. The bitterness had planted its roots long ago and had been left to grow.

Weeding it out would take some time and effort, but it would be worth it. Never let weeds lay waste to your garden, never let fear and guilt ruin something special.



*Zantedeschia  
aethiopica  
(Arum Lily)*

# The Mouser and the Millennium

*Ann Thomas*

Mousie, my cat, is concerned about the approaching millennium. I know this because she sits and stares at me, then goes to where her canned cat food is stored, gazes intently as though counting the cans, lays her ears flat as if making a landing strip for some unwitting, delectable bird, then produces several complaining meows. You can tell a complaining meow from all the rest: it is lower in pitch, and prolonged. I used to stack the cans according to the color of the label. Mousie complained until they were arranged randomly. Then she purred.

This morning, an hour or so before I planned to arise, Mousie plopped her nine-pound self with her usual alacrity square upon the head of my bed, and began chewing my hair, a behavior ordinarily reserved for only the most frustrating of situations. I tried to ignore her. Mousie persevered. I would not give in. Sensing my stubbornness, she crept forward and licked my eyelids. It is difficult to ignore a rough tongue on your eyelid! Turning over and covering my head did not discourage her. Soon the prehensile paw found its way under the tightly wrapped covers, followed by one cold nose and the rough tongue. I could tell it would be useless to continue my charade. After all, since I covered my head, she knew I was no longer asleep! What could be so pressing an issue in one cat's life to risk being catapulted from my bed at so early an hour? Perhaps the water bowl was empty.

I stretched, much to her delight as that signals impending action, usually directed toward gratification of one sort or another for Mousie, and while not bounding out of bed, I did vacate my warm, invaded retreat. Once vertical and robed, I started downstairs. Uncharacteristically, Mousie didn't follow me—she was sitting, very regally, in front of the one extra bag of dry cat food. What could this mean? She looked at me with those big green eyes and gave a plaintive meow, which is short, high-pitched, and weak. This scenario was replayed three consecutive mornings. I was becoming annoyed, and so was Mousie: her person, me, usually learned more quickly.

Saturday is grocery-shopping day. As it happened, this Saturday among other coupons that a friend had clipped and sent, were two coupons for dry cat food. I dutifully made that purchase. Because they

are heavy and I was tired (probably from not getting enough sleep!) the cat food bags remained in the car trunk. As is her habit, Mousie skittered through the door into the kitchen and waited to see what delicacies her person had procured for the household. She played with an empty paper bag, probably more to amuse me than herself as she shot fleeting glances my way as much as to say, "See, I'm doing that thing that makes you laugh." When all groceries were shelved, Mousie's absence was conspicuous. Not in the paper bag; not on top of the refrigerator; not behind the open cupboard door; not 'hiding' behind the candlestick lamp (she is ever so annoyed when I say, "oh, there you are," because she thinks that I cannot see her there, but sometimes I forget that part of the game she has taught me). I concluded that wherever the Mouser was, she wished not to be found and went on about the tasks on my To Do list which was rather lengthy for a Saturday.

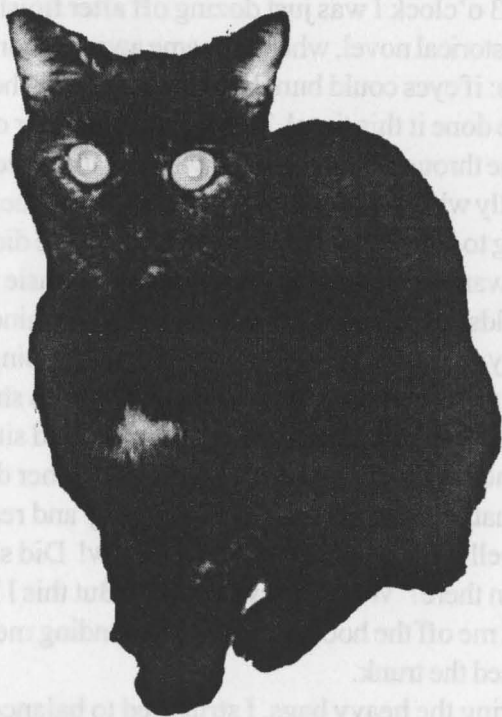
About 3 o'clock I was just dozing off after finishing a less-than-inspiring historical novel, when I became aware of something staring at me. Oh, yes: if eyes could burn holes through one, those green eyes would have done it this time! There sat the Mouser on the porch stool, staring at me through the window. Evidently the screen door hadn't closed tightly when I came in from shopping. On cue, I announced I was coming to let her back in. To my surprise, she didn't want in, rather, she wanted me out. You can tell what Mousie wants often by the way she holds her tail: that tail was straight out behind her and she trotted away as though she was on a mission, stopping periodically to be certain I was still following, which I was. When she reached my recently washed car, I expected her to leap up and sit in her usual "I am Queen of the car" pose, waiting for me to shout her down. But she didn't do that. Instead she stretched her body and reached up to the trunk and bellowed a most demanding meow! Did she sense the cat food bags in there? Who will ever know? But this I know: she wasn't going to let me off the hook here. Her demanding meows continued until I opened the trunk.

Gathering the heavy bags, I struggled to balance them and close the trunk while not dropping the keys into the trunk. Success! And off we trundled, Mousie bounding ahead (she had no heavy bags to carry), her tail now upright with a slight forward curl in the top. When the cat food bags were deposited in their proper place, I turned around just in



time to see a look of deep satisfaction on Mousie's face. I recognize that look because it is the same one she has when she has helped control the bird population by catching one that evidently forgot it should have stayed in the air.

Figuring that now it was safe to return to my couch, I was dismayed to find the Mouser crouched sphinx-like on the counter near her package of treats. Yes, the millennium IS coming, Mousie, but I don't think there will be a shortage of heart-shaped, salmon-flavored cat treats in the bright pink bag! And with that, we both settled in for a nap.



## Something Fishy

*J.D. Emens*

It was a cool August evening in the Katmai National Monument Park midway up the inland underbelly of the Alaskan tundra. The sky was gunmetal gray sweeping to a bright crimson stripe in the faint-hearted western sky. The breeze, smelling of honeysuckle and lush dew-kissed cowslips, came across us from left to right.

We were fishing. Dad and I had our Orvis gear, from waders to vest and cap, and were doing our best to throw wet flies at nimble and wily Rainbow Trout; so far, the fish had won. The stream was large, maybe forty yards across, and the water rushed by at an eyebrow raising pace. We were in the middle of the river, hip deep wearing waders, when I got one. It was a big one, flashing and leaping and dancing along the top of the water like a windblown waterbug across a shiny puddle. Dad coached me as we reeled the fish in only to have it get close and then make another run out. After three or four of these runs, I could tell the fish was losing steam. I brought it close and Dad landed it with a big net.

Now I was fourteen, which meant I knew everything, but when I saw the size and color of this fish I let out a yell that could be heard as far as Hawaii. Dad took the fish out of the net, and gently cradling it, he carefully removed the fly from the fish's mouth.

He picked it up and said, "Jackson, this truly is a fish, eight, maybe eight and a half pounds."

He reached over and handed the prize to me. I cradled it on my elbows with the whole fish's wingspan going crosswise against my body. The fish was deep silver blue melting to a ruddy alabaster belly with yellow-green fins. Dad stood back and took a photograph. He was proud. I was proud. An eight pound Rainbow Trout! We then released it slowly and carefully back in the water and the fish gratefully swam away. I wiped my slimy hands on my fishing vest and looked up at my father. His rugged jaw was pushed out and his shoulders back. We had both felt the communication with the fish and the water and the woods. This is why we had come. After a moment we separated to our different sides of the stream and began throwing flies, still soaking in the afterglow of catching the giant rainbow.

We fished until dusk. Dad caught two little ones. I caught nothing else, but I did not care. I had caught enough fish in that one rainbow to keep me proud and happy until Christmas! It was getting dark. We wound in our lines and began the one-half mile trek through the woods back to the lodge. It was near dark, and only a very narrow corridor of light from the tops of the trees gave us illumination for the roughcut path we were treading. The air was heavy, and I could feel the deep forest musk in my throat and lungs. I noticed there was no bird song and wondered why that was. I was about to ask Dad when I heard a snarling roar. I looked over at Dad, and he put his index finger to his mouth as if to say Shhhhhh! There was a rustling and rumbling sound ahead of us. This big brown blotch started to lumber its way toward us. It was a bear. It was a big bear—maybe 500 pounds. It was on the path in front of us about ten feet away.

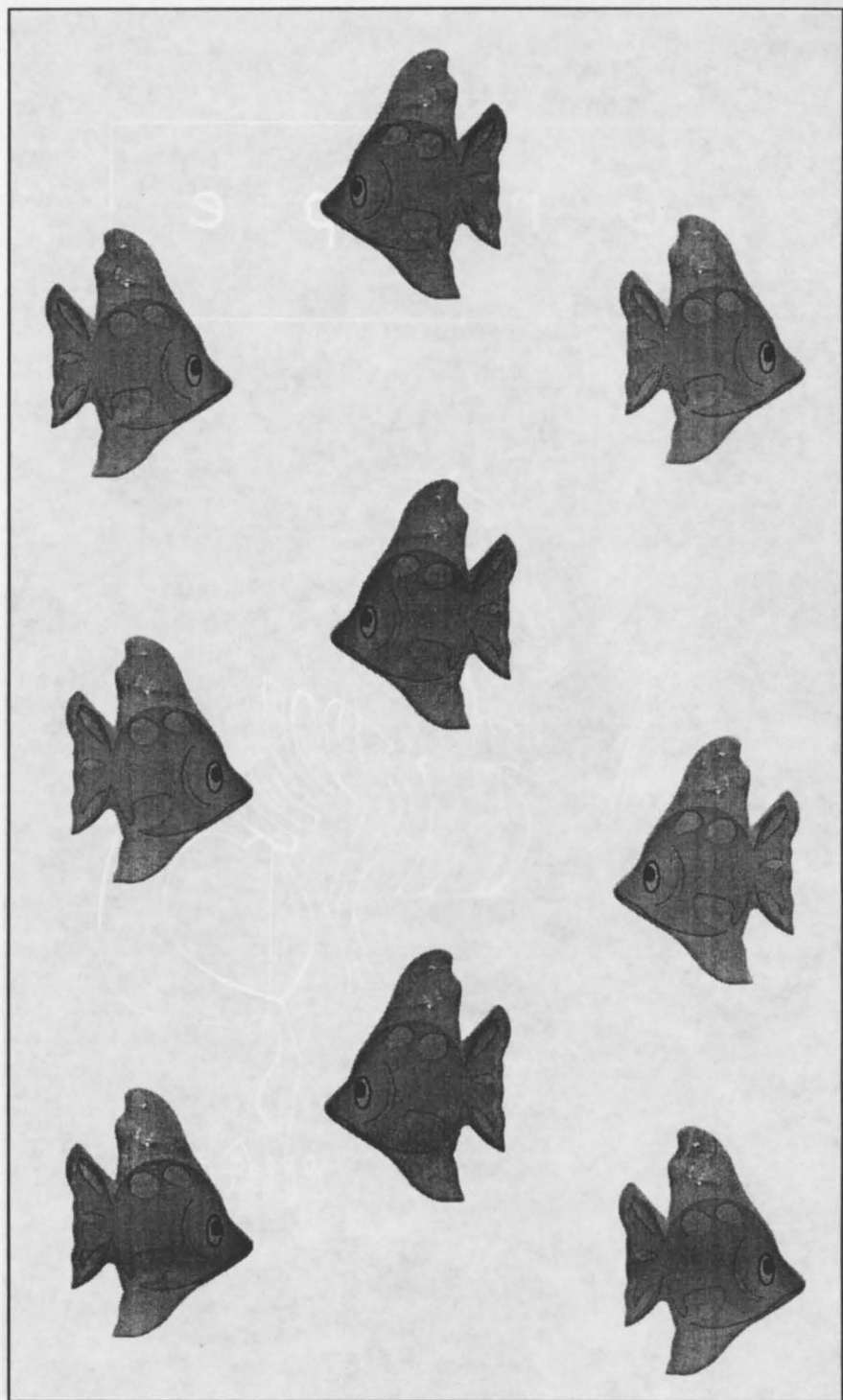
Dad very, very quietly whispered, “Whatever you do, Jackson, don’t move.” The bear plodded over to my father and gave him a sniff. Then he came over to me. On all fours he came up to my tummy. He sniffed and sniffed at me. I was so scared I barely breathed. I started to shake. I looked at Dad. He was watching the bear sniff me.

“Your vest, Jackson,” Dad whispered. “Your vest smells like fish; that is why he wants it. Carefully take it off and toss it a few feet away.” I did what my father told me. With this huge bear sniffing and licking my vest, I unsnapped the buckle and carefully slid out of the vest. With my hands shaking, I did my best to gingerly toss it a couple of yards off the path to my left.

The bear hesitated. I was holding my breath. Dad was watching ever so intently. Finally, the bear went over to the vest, picked it up, and unceremoniously dragged it down the path toward the stream.

Dad and I made it the rest of the way back to the lodge in record time. We told the folks who ran the lodge about our encounter with the bear. The owner said it was really pretty common, and we had done the right thing. Over dinner both Dad and I relaxed and gained back our composure. We both decided it was better to catch dinner than to be dinner.

It has been twenty years since Dad and I became friends with that big bear. We decided we would probably never see a closer call, but more important, the call put Dad and me closer together—forever.



# G r i p e





# How I Feel about the River Valley High School Crisis

Pat Wood

Is the contamination of the River Valley Middle and High School grounds really a *crisis* or is it just a way to scare the public into building new buildings at a new location? I have asked myself this question everyday since the dime-sized disk of paint was found on the school grounds.

As parents of two open enrolled students, one at the River Valley Middle School and one at the River Valley High School, my husband and I looked long and hard into several different school districts in which to send our girls and decided that the River Valley School District had the most to offer our children. We have not changed our minds in light of the current problems. This school district has good teaching and administrative staff behind it. We are proud to say to anyone that we have our children in this district. Moreover, the girls can say they go to a great school. This is something to be proud of given the problems in today's schools.

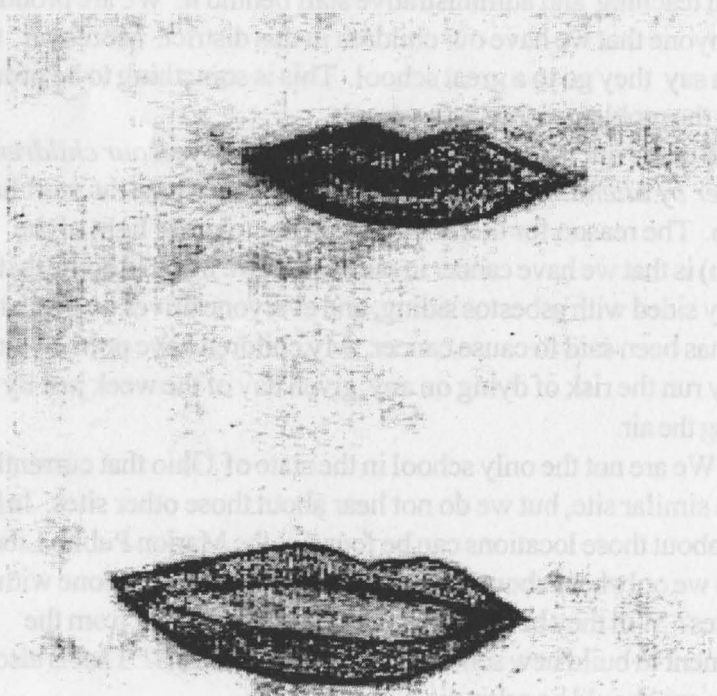
But the question always comes up: *Do we feel our children are in danger by attending this school?* Our answer from the start has been No. The reason for this answer (and not to make light of the situation) is that we have cancer in our family, we live in a home that is currently sided with asbestos siding, and everyone drives on black top which has been said to cause cancer. My children have pointed out that they run the risk of dying on any given day of the week just by breathing the air.

We are not the only school in the state of Ohio that currently sits on a similar site, but we do not hear about those other sites. Information about those locations can be found at the Marion Public Library. Why do we only hear about River Valley? What is being done with the other sites? Will they be lucky enough to receive money from the government to build new schools at different locations? That is also a question we should be asking.

We feel that the problem needs to be taken care of the best and fastest way possible. If this means that we have to replace bad soil with good soil, then do it. I would ask the question: If we end up with a new location for the school, do we not still have to clean up the current site? I believe that the answer is Yes. I also believe that, with all the negative

coverage of the situation, if we did move to a new location and clean up the old one, no one would be willing to purchase that site for any reason. What happens to the property then? It becomes an eye sore that everyone will still talk about.

What should remain uppermost in our minds is the safety of our children. So far that has been taken care of. If the situation becomes such that it is unsafe for our children, then I believe that the school district will take the necessary precautions to protect them. They have never done anything different. Let us keep that in mind as we continue to watch and wait for this situation to clean itself up.



*Illustration by Stephanie Hughes*

## Someone Knows

*Kelle Gabriel*

Somewhere, somebody knows . . . if the contents buried on River Valley School grounds have the potential to be a hazard to human life. And somewhere, somebody knows if the contents buried in surrounding areas like GTE, Grandview Estates, and the entire Army depot site have the potential to be hazardous to one's health. Yet, after two years of constant drilling and probing into the ground, nothing concrete has surfaced. I find this somewhat disturbing: not because I am a River Valley graduate, and not because I grew up in Grandview Estates. I'm disturbed because I feel like life threatening information is being withheld. Somewhere, somebody knows.

Given the land was used for military purposes during World War II, state and federal governments have the obligation to supply the public with information about the contents buried in the ground and the potential hazard those contents pose. Suppose for a moment that the land on which River Valley and the surrounding areas sit are indeed one big toxic dump. These sites have been evaluated by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. Aren't both agencies controlled by the government? Do you really think if there were a potential health threat the government would voluntarily inform the public when they are the ones responsible for putting that threat under ground in the first place? Somewhere, somebody knows.

In the past two years, I have seen changes in attitudes regarding the "River Valley Crisis." What started out as a genuine concern for the safety of students has turned into heated arguments over clean up, removal and restoration, and whether or not a new school should be built. These arguments only spawn more confrontation as people debate who should float the bill once the "appropriate" decision has been made. I don't know what the future holds for River Valley, but I'm sure there will be quite a hefty price tag attached. I just hope human life isn't part of the payment plan.

I'm not saying that "River Valley causes cancer" or that there is a possibility that the grounds hold a potential danger that the government is trying to cover up. All I am saying is that somewhere, somebody knows . . .

A c a d e m i c



F a r e

## Words In The Natural World

Bill Waddell

Literacy, to me, includes more than books, writings, and language. Literacy can be anything that shapes or changes your perspective on life or the world around you. Events in my life that seemingly have nothing to do with literacy usually end up having everything to do with literacy. My interest in a subject usually comes out of experience and then leads to other inquiry. I am the type of person who likes to know all I can about a subject, so I end up reading all I can about my subject. Reading is like a great adventure, and adventure is important when you live in a rural area.

I grew up south of Mt. Gilead, Ohio. We had ten acres with a big pond. Mt. Gilead, the nearest town, was a small-sized town with about two thousand people. When I was growing up there wasn't even a fast food restaurant there. It was a small, boring town, so I was often forced to find my own entertainment.

My brother and I always loved to explore our property and neighboring woods. Many times we sent Mom into a panic with our "pets" we would find in the woods. Mom and Dad were busy with work so they were frequently gone, which meant more time to get into trouble. My brother and I came up with all kinds of schemes, most of which usually meant one of us getting hurt or grounded.

We spent many Saturdays watching television, and of course, that also led us into certain troubles. While I was being inspired by TV to do some stupid stuff, the program *Wild America*, by Marty Stouffer, was also turning me on to the natural world. It was my all time favorite show as a kid, and even now I like to watch it.

In his program, Marty went around to different areas in America, and showed the variety of wildlife and how these diverse animals lived. As the leader of these televised adventures, Marty was always happy and had fun exploring nature.

After watching *Wild America* for a few years, I decided I should conduct a study on rabbits in the field behind the house. After all, Marty had fun doing it and I would, too. Marty was a role model, and I wanted to be just like him. After I did this study I was going to mail it to Marty Stouffer so he could use it for his show. Evening after



evening I would sit and watch rabbits, and I would record what I saw into a journal. I still can remember sitting in the fields watching the rabbits play and chase each other while the sun turned golden and did a dance with long shadows across the field.

I spent numerous summer evenings merely sitting and letting nature share with me its wonders. At the time I felt I was doing a ground breaking study. This was really my first time writing outside of what I did at school. I never sent Marty the journal, but I felt at the time if he had the study he would understand the rabbit more. Later, at age 18, when I was moving out of my parents' house, I found the journal and it really wasn't as ground breaking as I remember writing. Maybe that's just how memory works: it likes to create something grand out of something that was really quite small. The journal had entries in it like "the rabbit ran around in a circle" or "it was a gray color."

Being a kid when I wrote that, I thought it was the best study ever done. It meant everything to me because it made me feel I could be like Marty. That was important because Marty was (and still is) a hero of mine. That one TV show was a big factor in creating my passion for wanting to conserve the natural world, which I still carry with me today.

When I was in the seventh grade my parents started renting out a house trailer to a guy named Keith Chafin. Keith was about 21 at the time. He was a good guy and very funny. I mowed his lawn for seven dollars a week, and eventually got to know him. He started driving me to the woods to go hunting. After just a few times of traveling the outdoors with him, all I thought about was hunting, even though I didn't even hunt myself the first few times Keith took me.

In English class, I remember every day watching the trees to see if the wind was blowing, because we didn't go if the wind was blowing hard. With all my thoughts on hunting, naturally I started to read books and magazines pertaining to hunting. Zane Gray, a writer of Westerns, was one of my favorites. While reading his stories I felt like I was on the track of the mountain lion, with the dog's bawl echoing in the distance and a fine snowfall blanketing the ground. His stories drew me right into the action and I read almost all of them. Any hunting magazine laying around was also a sure target for me to read. Looking back

now, I can see this time in my life was when I really started to read and explore the world farther away than Mt. Gilead

Hunting opened me up to the natural world around me. If you sit under a tree for a few hours, you are likely to see some amazing acts by the animals that surround us daily. Hunting helped shape my life and open me up to new things, and it was another experience that gave me a drive to conserve wildlife. While I no longer hunt, it was a great experience as a kid and something that I will never forget.

Around the same time as my hunting trips, Mr. King, my junior high school history teacher, turned me onto history. He was very eccentric, and he would do dances on his desk and sing very loudly about history. He also carried a yard stick that was known to smack many a sleeping head. He didn't turn me onto textbook-style history but rather to books on frontier life. My favorite author was Allen Eckert, whose books were long and boring at times, but they told the whole story. They appealed to me because I liked reading about Indians and I appreciated stories that told how this area once was. Indians always have fascinated me, probably because my great Grandma was half Cherokee. I also have a deep respect for Indians, because they were able to live in harmony with the natural world, unlike us. Reading about them was like looking into the past and being able to see the progressive destruction we have inflicted upon this land. This gave me a desire to try to preserve what resources we have left. Mr. King was an influence to me because he turned me onto history, and history is the greatest teacher we have.

During my high school years I slipped into a teen mindset where I thought I knew everything and I just wanted to have fun. Friends and girls were all that mattered so I didn't read or write any more than I had to. It took me a few years to get beyond that way of thinking, and after high school, I bought a camera and started taking nature photographs. Since then, this activity has transformed from just an occasional hobby to a full-blown passion.

Since that first camera I have taken two first-place ribbons in contests. While out taking pictures the world melts around me, and I

think of nothing but my subject. It is hard to find an escape in life, but photography is mine. If I have a bad day I grab the camera and problems just seem to evaporate—they disappear like morning fog colliding with the sun's rays. The camera has changed me and my way of thinking. It has opened my eyes to the small, magnificent details in nature that most people will never recognize: butterflies unable to fly in the morning dew, the dots on a fawn's coat in West Virginia, the idiosyncratic sounds of an impending thunderstorm. Once you learn to notice these details every day, the world changes its appearance and you are able to notice these changes.

It seems looking back on it now all of these events, no matter how minute, they have helped shape me into what I am today. I am currently attending college to become a wildlife biologist, and I can thank Marty, Mr. King, my good buddy Keith, and of course my trusty Minolta for helping me become what I am today.



*Illustration by Joe McDonald*

## Television: A Savior in a Downfallen Society

*Rhett Crabtree*

In the year 1925 a man named Charles Francis Jenkins had a brainstorm. Why don't I, he thought, create a device that will transmit a picture combining photography, optics, and radio, which will also use scanning discs with vacuum-tube amplifiers and photo-electric cells? This brainstorm was put into production and the television was created for the purpose of education. The television has grown into a modern day appliance so popular that every household has at least two. But, even with the television's mass popularity the idea of education has not been forgotten. Even in these modern times, salutary, and realistic programs such as "Full House" and "Saved by the Bell" have graced America's homes, reinforcing family values, nonviolent decision making, and some of the best hairstyles seen anywhere. But today some people complain about the evils of modern day television programming. People claim that it is too explicit and foul, while never bothering to see the good points of TV. They stand in pulpits and on stages denouncing the greatly abounding "evil" that *is* modern day television. They call it television not TV. TV is a nickname; nicknames are for friends, and apparently television is no friend of theirs. We hear their comments, read their articles, and decide that they, the finger-pointing radicals, are correct in their belief that the television is an evil perverter of innocent minds. The fact is, however, that television is educational, beneficial, and wonderful in every day life. For example, television stresses self-defense tactics, while taking a stand against totalitarianism, and demonstrates how to be a more suitable citizen of the United States. Clearly, today's television is informative and beneficial to its viewers despite what critics may claim.

In schoolhouses all around America, children are bullied. In factories and other work places, bigger, stronger workers physically push around smaller, defenseless employees. This is where the benefit of television comes into play. Pay-per-view, a channel accessible through cable companies at a small charge to the viewer, features biannual programs called "Ultimate Fighting Championships." In these programs, several trained professionals skilled in hand to hand combat, go head to head in submission style cage matches. The viewers of these

programs can learn quite a lot about proper defense strategies, forceful reasoning, and intimidation techniques benefiting their social lives by encouraging would-be bullies to beware. For example, Clyde is a small meek individual with an under bite that causes him to be shy and humble around co-workers. But, give Clyde an "Ultimate Fighting Championship" to view on pay-per-view, and his meekness will be transformed into a responsible warrior-like status. Viewers also learn life lessons about proper sportsmanship, and good social skills, both of which may help prevent physical confrontations. Athletes shake hands, hug, and praise opponents, reinforcing positive values to young and old viewers alike. The viewers come away from the program with more than just a lesson learned but also a sense of accomplishment, knowing that their lives will forever be affected for the positive.

Totalitarianism is anti-American, no questions asked, and one television big shot is helping to put totalitarianism down in order to raise American morale. Ted Turner, a man known world-wide for being one of the few opulent rednecks, is also well known for his successful company, World Championship Wrestling (WCW). The WCW, in recent programs, has taken a stand against totalitarianism in a very "George Orwell-ish" fashion. Orwell, best known for his books *Animal Farm* and *1984*, once said that all of his work, in one form or another, takes a very strong stance against the evilness of totalitarianism. The WCW has adopted Orwell's point of view with its recent showing of WCW President Ric Flair as a controlling, self-centered idiot. The WCW ringside fans oppose Flair through loud booings and character slamming phrases written upon poster board signs. The home audience also finds themselves in disgust of Flair's dictator-like speeches and attitude. Ted Turner's WCW is benefiting America's television viewers by showing the corruption of totalitarianism in its most raw and filthy state. Millions of WCW viewers sit in front of their television sets each Monday evening simply for the sake of entertainment, but they come away from their TV sets with a sense of pride, joyful and happy that America is a democratic society. They learn that whether or not a leader is well liked, what he commands, and what he says doesn't ever turn into reality without the consent of the masses. The WCW in a quiet, meek, and disguised way is raising American pride by demonstrating the depravity that abounds in non-democratic societies.



The program entitled “Cops,” which airs on the Fox network, is a documentary of sorts that features real life situations that the men and women of law enforcement find themselves in every day. A camera crew from the Fox network goes from city to city, riding along in police cruisers as they are called into action. The action may be as simple as a traffic violation or as complex and brutal as a quintuple homicide. From this program viewers can learn the ins and outs of law enforcement. Once learned, the viewer can do one of two things. He can either use the laws learned to his advantage by not breaking the law. Or, the craftier viewer might attempt to learn the flaws of the police business through this program in order to commit an immaculate crime for personal monetary gain. Both benefit the viewer through the fact that he has gained the knowledge of something that he otherwise wouldn’t have had.

In conclusion, the selfish, “problem seekers,” who incorrectly label television as pointless, shallow, or harmful to today’s society are totally wrong in their beliefs. A day may come when the television in all of its modern glory, with all of its astounding educational value and its phenomenal, family oriented content will cease to exist as we know it. And on that day maybe someone, maybe even one of the “problem seekers,” will see the error of those ways and call out for television to become the way it once was. Or better put, the way it is currently, the savior of our downfallen society.



*Illustration by Stephanie Hughes*

# Ruminations



## Oh Baby, How I've Waited

Josette Schaber

I walk through the door, noticing that all the comfy couches and chairs are already taken; I sign up at the reception desk and place my cup in the bucket on the counter. I go the ten feet to the hard wooden chairs and settle down onto the cream-colored chair with a sigh and the thought of, *How long will I wait today?*

By the sixth month, trips to the OB become pretty routine. You sit in the waiting room for forty-five minutes to an hour and a half, then you finally venture through the maze of corridors to your exam room in one of the fashionable baby colors: mint green, pink, or blue. You walk up to the dreaded scale, step on and find out if after your appointment you can eat that sundae you've been dreaming of. They take your blood pressure, check the baby's heartbeat, and tell you it will be just a moment. Ten minutes later the doctor's assistant, or on that rare occasion the doctor, walks in and asks how you're doing. If you're like me, everything's always fine. They prod around on your protruding belly to check the size of the baby, sit you up, ask if you have any questions, and say, "Everything looks fine—see you in four weeks." All of which takes a grand total of five minutes.

I leave the office thinking of your room, wondering if I will have it finished by the time you arrive. I still need a mattress, a bumper guard, and lots of small things. How will I ever get them all in time?

I arrive home and sit beside your cradle which has been up for a month now. I place your toy train just so—it has to be at the perfect angle. I rock the cradle back and forth, wondering how different it will feel with your small sleeping form laying inside. I dream of your small head: will it have lots of dark hair like your sister or will you be bald? I hope you have your daddy's beautiful blue eyes, but they will probably be brown like mine. They say that man is afraid of the unknown. I'm excited: all the possibilities for your looks, your personality, and your future. I wonder what you will be when you grow up—years from now. Will you be a painter, a musician, a doctor, or a computer technician?

I remember being pregnant with your sister. The waiting doesn't get much better. The OB appointments get closer together—every two weeks then every week. But time still ticks by in its own tick-tock-click way.

It's Thanksgiving time: the days are cold and daylight hours are short. The Christmas craze has picked up its force, and I sit by your cradle and wonder what your first Christmas will be like. You'll be almost a year old by then, starting to walk and getting into things. I remember your sister started walking two days before Christmas, which was the best Christmas gift I could have gotten. It's hard to concentrate on Christmas with only two months 'til your arrival. To think its only Thanksgiving.

I roll off the couch and hobble to the kitchen to fill your sister's juice cup. I look at the baby bottles in the kitchen cabinet and remember her small form as I held her close and watched her drink every drop of formula. I wonder if I will have the same memories of you. Two months and I will know—8 weeks, 60 days, 1,440 hours—and I will know. Of course that's only an approximation, because everyone knows a baby comes when it comes. It seems they always prefer to make you wait.

It's Christmas. The birth of Christ. I wonder if Mary felt this uncomfortable, irritable, and impatient. Tick-tock-click. Grandma's windup clock goes tick-tock-click as the minutes ooze by. I lay on the bed, unable to do much else, the size of my belly preventing much exercise. Well, for that matter, preventing pretty much everything. I sat on the couch this morning video taping your sister as she unwrapped her gifts. Once Daddy showed her how, she tore open the multi-colored packages. Each color a flash in the eye of the camera, a moment here and then gone—gone so quickly, just a glimpse of a memory. When it was said and done, she had accomplished her task in only five minutes. To think it took me three hours to carefully wrap each package. Someday you'll be sitting on the floor beside her grabbing at gifts and arguing over who they belong to. Then years from now you'll grow up and maybe be a firefighter saving people's lives.

It's January. The beginning of a new year and soon the beginning of a new life. My last appointment before your due date is today. I walk into the office and groan as I realize there are no comfy couches or chairs available. I sign in, place my cup in the bucket, and walk over to the cream-colored chair with a sigh and the thought, *How long will I wait today?*

## Whither A.D. 2000?

*Ann Thomas*

My best work seems to occur either just before awakening or just as I drift into sleep: that mentally slippery time when thoughts glide freely across the mind and the hand doesn't find a pen, or if it does, I do not wish to activate the body to find paper for fear of disrupting thought. Hence, only the shadows of best thought remain for daytime arranging. I remember this morning thinking about the turn of the century and our new millennium. So many folks are concerned about the approaching millennium. Why, when we have history which tells us it repeats itself? Won't war and famine and class envy and racial hatred and poverty always be with us? Will not the struggles of human spirit continue? Isn't that the way of humanity?

This morning's sunrise was spectacular: some are, some are not; but the sun DOES rise somewhere every morning and will it not continue to do so? What does change then, we might ask? Among the many things that do change are characteristics of the population. This is evident as we compare generations. In my generation there is a strong work ethic. That certainly is not the case among the 30-some year olds: as a group they are euphemistically referred to as "slackers." After dealing with several groups of 20-some year olds, I believe they could be labeled "floaters": floating along from day to day, consuming and letting others do and provide for them. However, much more than attitudes and behaviors vary across generations. In my mind the crux of the difference has something to do with the quality of the human spirit, with what is valued. Are values inherent? Perhaps.

When things weren't going well, my great-grandmother used to quote Robert Browning: "God's in His heaven and all's right with the world." This wise and stalwart woman lived through the war of 1896, the first World War and the second World War believing that phrase. What incredible optimism, faith or resignation! I presume God is still "in His heaven" and all is still *not* right with the world. Has it a chance to become all right in the new millennium? Perhaps.

Genetic engineering could wipe out disease. Birth control might ease the population explosion. But where will the will come from to contain the abuse and destruction of our planet's natural resources?



Will Darwin's law of natural selection prevail? Where will the enlightenment come from to establish justice, righteousness and right purpose in human lives? Who is to say what is right purpose? Who will administer world justice? Who will define righteousness? Are there "laws" of the universe at work in our world that will configure the future? Perhaps.

The concept of chaos is generally understood better than the concept of entropy. While humans, by and large, ignore or recklessly consume the planet's natural resources, entropy is silently working. Humans experience chaos in daily life. We don't see or feel entropy working. Entropy is a difficult concept to grasp because the process itself remains invisible. It is the insidious, yet ever present decaying of matter, external and internal. It is also the driving of unattended systems evermore toward inertia and uniformity. Entropy, technically described in Newton's second law of thermodynamics, basically states that systems left to their own devices will unravel and become chaotic. A rather sorry state of affairs! Yet, when we observe life of plants, animals, ourselves, and of all things organic and inorganic, we see the truth of Newton's thinking in action. What effort might alter this scheme? And what shall we call such effort: right action as opposed to wrong action, or inaction?

It could be that the mystery of life as we know it is simply this: entropy is, and we ought to exert our time and energy into making the best of this situation. An alternative would be to give up, to waste our lives. Or, we could selfishly set out to waste and consume as much of time and resources as possible in one lifetime. If this generation of "floaters" is existing as an example of the law of entropy, then should we hold out hope for the new millennium? Perhaps.

There is another law of physics which says that for every action there is another action equal in strength and opposite in direction. If we apply this principle to our "floaters," then the world must be ready for a new generation: a group of conscientious, fair-minded, diligent, ethical, perceptive, caring, fun-loving, interacting people of incredible optimism, or faith, who will lead the world into another Golden Age, into a wiser existence. Is this possibly what the new millennium will bring?

Another striking sunset signals the end of yet another day. And as the fog of sleep drifts in, will it also bring more thoughts of the new millennium? Perhaps.

# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Heidi Cristobal, professional custodian/ladies' man, has written and published several short stories, essays and poems. Possible the best looking young man in the entire world, Cristobal enjoys playing Rugby, working Ray Gunaway, and listening to music by Neil Young and Bach. In his free time he enjoys public speaking, dancing, pickling figs, running 100m sprints, and attempting to sell himself to several successful companies including W.W. Frank's Cab, and Playboy's "Scout Squad".

Martha Dickson teaches English at OSU Marion. This piece about her grandmother is part of an on-going (and going, and going) project about her family. It is her fondest hope that she finishes it before long since she started the work in 1992. Maybe in the next millennium?

J. D. Rogers is a lecturer in Economics and Political Science at OSU Marion. He has a B.A. from Kenyon College, an M.S. from London School of Economics, and an M.A. from Miami of Ohio. He enjoys writing poetry and short stories in his spare time.

Doni Fisher is an English and history major and she is a junior. She hopes to graduate in spring 2001 and then go to graduate school. She enjoys the mountains of Colorado.

JoAnne Fitzgerald is finding with writing fiction through her participation in the Ohio State over 60 program. Remembering her childhood during the 1960s is providing themes for film and fiction.

Kelli Gabriel is an English major hoping to graduate spring 2000. She has a little boy. His name is Matthew, and he will be three in March.

# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**Rhett Crabtree**, professional custodian/ladies' man, has written and published seven short stories, essays and poems. Possible the best looking young man in the entire world, Crabtree enjoys playing Rugby, reading Ray Bradbury, and listening to music by Neil Young and Bach. In his free time he enjoys public speaking, dancing, picking fights, running from fights, and attempting to sell himself to several successful companies including WCW, Frank's Cab, and Playboy's "Scout Squad".

**Marcia Dickson** teaches English at OSU Marion. This piece about her grandmother is part of an on-going (and going, and going) project about her family. It is her fondest hope that she finishes it before long since she started the work in 1992. Maybe in the next millenium?

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**Kelle Gabriel** is an English major hoping to graduate spring 2000. She has a little boy. His name is Matthew, and he will be three in March.

**Stephanie Hughes** is a freshman majoring in Art Education. She has recently been hired to teach Commercial Art and Graphic Communications for the state of Ohio Department of Youth Services. She also serves on the Cultural Arts and the Celebrate Summer Institute Art Fair committees and has assisted with the visual arts class at the Bazzoli Institutes here at OSUM. She is the mother of two children ages seven and fourteen.

**Joe McDonald** is a freshman at OSUM majoring in Art. He is nineteen years old and enjoys drawing, painting, and playing the guitar.

**Diane K. Osborne** is an English major at OSUM. She enjoys reading, writing, travelling, and hockey. She is a die-hard Indians fan and enjoys a good game, even if it's in the cheap seats. Go Tribe!

**Josette Schaber** is currently an English major attending classes at OSUM. She works at Macola Software as a Technical Communicator. Any spare time is spent with her husband, Chris; daughter, Annslea; and son, Evan (due January, 2000).

**Ann Thomas** is new to the OSU Marion campus. She is a graduate of the University of Akron and of Kent State University. She also studied education in Edenborough, Scotland. The Mouser and Ann live with their family on a farm in Mount Gilead. Although telepathic, the Mouser has no formal education.

**Bill Waddell** is attending Ohio State for Wildlife Management. His goal is to work in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He is also interested in taking photography farther than just a hobby.

**Pat Wood** works for OSU Marion Library as a Library Media Technical Assistant II. Her interests include her family, reading, sewing, and cross-stitching. She is very active in her church and is a 4-H advisor with the River Valley Classy Clovers.

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